

## Engagement

Engaging families in identifying strengths and protective factors; in making decisions and in active case plan development is central to our work to achieve the outcomes of safety, permanency and well being of children.

The foundation and goal of engagement is the construction of relationships with the families we serve. This must include every parent and all kin with connections to the child(ren), or kin who might be resources to consider for child placement and/or family support. Building relationships with families and kin requires a well-trained and prepared workforce that can demonstrate and communicate respect, skills of engagement with families, and skills of cultural competence.

Our challenges in reaching our outcome of full family engagement at every point in the system include: identifying and involving all parents, and when appropriate, kin; increasing social worker visits with children and all parents, and providing services to meet the needs of children, parents and resource parents.

Major strategies in response to those challenges and outcomes include:

- Engaging families means that we must be capable and thorough in identifying and locating parents, resource kin, and identifying tribal affiliation.
- Once identified, our processes must not only be friendly, but a step beyond. We must place stronger emphasis on giving family and kin participatory rights and engaging them in the active case plan building, identifying strengths and protective factors, service needs, and placement if this becomes necessary.
- One of the strategies for early engagement of families and kin is through Family Team Decision-making Meetings. If longer meetings or opportunities to build plans are required, a Family Group Decision-Making conference can be scheduled. We have the resources and tools required to make family engagement a cornerstone of our work in child welfare.
- Our policy will require face-to-face contact between social workers and parents, and social workers and children, every thirty days. This will institutionalize our commitment to build and maintain our engagement/relationship with families and give us additional opportunities to enhance relationships, review plans and progress, and stay updated on essential matters in the case.

Involving parents, kin, the child and siblings where appropriate in decision-making and planning requires skills and a commitment of time, resources, and will to make it

happen. It is central to the mission of family engagement leading toward more positive safety and permanency outcomes for children. Understanding and carrying through with plans to engage and involve families is very difficult work that requires creativity, flexibility, and applied problem-solving casework skills and approaches. Good supervision is essential for a social worker to do this work well, as this is a front-line task supported by the system. Therefore, we must build and support a supervision model that has capacity to support social workers in family engagement outcome successes in our system.

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